

Senate Judiciary Committee  
Opponent Testimony SB216  
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Committee, this testimony is presented on behalf of myself and Lucas County Children Services. Lucas County Children Services (LCCS) is a county child protection agency whose mission is to lead the community in the protection of children. My testimony is in opposition to SB 216 as I believe this bill falls short of that mission.

In 2020, Lucas County had an estimated population of 430,000 people. Per our agency's 2020 annual report, LCCS opened cases on 450 families where child abuse or neglect was substantiated. Fifty-eight percent of those families were able to be served by our agency in their own homes, roughly 261 families. In comparison, 42% or 189 of those families required custody intervention. On average, in 2020, 56% of open cases listed substance abuse as the main concern for the family, with heroin and opiates making up 48% of those cases. Many families who struggled with substance abuse participated in services while retaining custody of their children and required no court intervention.

Also per LCCS 2020 data, LCCS served approximately 730 children in the custody of the agency or relatives each month. In 2020, Lucas County averaged 236 licensed foster homes meaning that many of the children served by Lucas County were placed in network foster homes and a large number were placed outside the local area.

In looking at SB 216, it is vital for the Committee to be cognizant of these statistics to have an accurate picture of the child welfare system, its objectives, and its capacity. Child welfare's primary goal is protecting children while maintaining those children in a safe environment. Sometimes that means removing children from their parents and relatives, but often that means working with parents while maintaining their children in their own home even when substance use is a concern. Many recent laws and State initiatives have been aimed at assisting Ohio's child welfare system by bolstering its resources to prevent child removals.

For years, Ohio has had great success with specialty dockets aimed at intensive services for parents recovering from substance abuse. These specialty dockets have increased across



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Ohio in recent years and are an excellent resource for families and child protection agencies. Also, Ohio START has been implemented in many Ohio counties and is gaining momentum as a tool to aid in substance abuse recovery for families. Most recently, Family First Prevention Services are currently being rolled out in an attempt to avoid the trauma of child removal on both the parents and the child.

Despite these recent initiatives, SB 216 aims to take away these family-centered alternatives in favor of immediate removals of infants from their parents no matter the circumstances or intervening factors. The bill would require the Court to order parents to complete an inpatient rehabilitation program regardless if a licensed assessor recommends one and regardless of available beds in those programs. The bill would also require that a parent take the child to monthly medical appointments upon reunification regardless of whether those appointments are medically indicated. Each of these proposed statutory elements infringes upon a parent's rights by requiring court orders the parents may be unable to comply with due to outside entities' rules and restrictions and not upon the parents' unwillingness to comply.

In addition, the requirements that all substance-exposed infants be placed in the temporary custody of the state's county child protection agencies would only increase the placement crisis currently at issue in Ohio. Ohio's placement resources for its foster youth are dwindling, and thus why the Ohio Dept. of Job and Family Services has created initiatives to recruit and retain quality foster parents. SB 216 would unnecessarily burden the already overburdened foster homes placing foster youth at an increased risk due to the increased stress the foster home would be under.

While SB 216 is attempting to correct a horrible consequence of the opiate epidemic, it unfortunately, misses its aim by creating additional barriers to reaching the goal of healthy and safe children. Ohio already has effective resources available to meet the needs of substance-addicted parents. However, these resources are not readily available in all corners of Ohio. Rather than overburden the foster system with SB216, Ohio should focus on the continued development and implementation of these resources across Ohio, especially in underserved areas.

While we continue to fight this opiate epidemic, we encourage the Committee to continue its pursuit of protecting children by creating opportunities for recovery while preserving families, as has been its aim through past laws. We encourage the Committee to oppose SB 216 as it falls short of these goals. Please reach out to me with any questions.